

Castlemaine Naturalist

May 2019

Vol. 44.4 #475

Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Masked Lapwings are commonly seen around Lake Joanna in the CBG - photo by Noel Young

Needle Grasses Margaret Panter

I'd like to give some more details and clarity on Needle Grass, which George Broadway mentioned in his President's Report (CN April).

Needle Grasses and their introduced relations are also known as stipoid weeds, as they as well as the related Espartillo and Serrated Tussock used to be in *Stipa* genus, along with Australian Spear Grasses. The genus was then split. Australian Spear Grasses are now in *Austrostipa* and the introduced stipoid grasses are mostly in *Nassella*, with Espartillo being in *Amelichloa*.

Five stipoid weeds are in Mount Alexander Shire: Serrated Tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*) at Redesdale; Chilean Needle Grass (*N. neesiana*) at e.g. Castlemaine and Newstead; Texas Needle Grass (*N. leucotricha*) at e.g. Castlemaine and Elphinstone; Cane Needle Grass (*N. hyalina*) at Castlemaine and Espartillo (*Amelichloa caudata*) at Castlemaine and possibly Baringhup.

A West Castlemaine resident told me he alerted the State government to Chilean Needle Grass in a nearby paddock decades ago, but nothing was done. I've known about Chilean NG and Espartillo in Castlemaine for at least 10 years, and 4 or 5 years ago, I discovered that some of what I thought was Chilean NG was in fact Texas NG. Then about a year after that, a council Parks & Gardens worker alerted me to the Needle Grass in Castlemaine Botanical Gardens, and I discovered that much of it is Cane NG.

The oldest *Castlemaine Plant List* I can find (20 Jun 11) lists all of the above except Cane NG. The most recent one I have (6 Sep 14) also does not list it. So Cane NG is new to the *Plant List*.

Thank you to the 7 other Field Nats (as well as the 15 non-members) who have worked as volunteers to help dig out the Needle Grasses in Castlemaine.

[see also Margaret's article on identification in February CN#472 - ED]

April Observations ("Wildlife" 1940)

George Broadway

Autumn 1940 must have been a good period for insects and spiders as many specimens were sent in for identification. Comments were therefore brief. At this period many specimens were being submitted for the first time but as we have seen many continued to be sent in in subsequent years suggesting that people had not carefully read these earlier editions. So some of what we had in April 1940 was as follows :-

SPIDERS

Reservoir: Poultry tick. Contact Dept of Agriculture

Malvern: Hunchback or Turret spider. Fairly rare. Harmless (Does anyone know of this one?) A Trapdoor spider found recently in Queensland builds a "turret" around its hole instead of the usual plug.

Beaufort: Redback Spider. Venomous, really dangerous. Should be killed on sight. See Sep 16

Ascot Vale: Redback spider

Fawkner: You sent 3 small Redbacks. When they reached me 2 had gone but the remaining one looked very plump and prosperous.

Yundool: Spider which begins its web with white, then completes with yellow is the Golden Web Spider or *Nephila*. Aborigines used the strong web for fishing see July 16

Windsor & St Kilda: Geometrical Spider or Orb-spinner *Aranaeus wagneri*. Catcher of night-flying insects.

Brighton & Ringwood also. See May 17

Grong Grong: Small Hunting Spider; hunts by stealth and speed.

Abbotsford: (Twice) Bird-dropping spider. Frequently sent in. *Celeana excata* see May 17

Beulah: Grey Wolf Spider *Lycosa ramose*. Lives in holes in the ground but is not a trapdoor spider. A relative of the Tarantula of S.Europe. Bite has been known to cause swelling, inflammation and nausea. See May 17

Burnie & Brunswick: A true scorpion, but too small to cause any serious damage.

Ringwood: & Dimboola; Small spider with black spikes and a back like an enamelled brooch – The Spiny spider, *Gasteracantha minax*. Harmless and great flycatcher. see Oct 16

BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS

Burnie: Case Moth Oct 16

Bendigo: Hawk Moth, powerful wings and streamlined body Nov 16

Caulfield: Woolly Bear caterpillars which will become tiger or leopard moths.

Monbulk: Fawn Hawk Moth *Hippotion*, making its way South.

Mt Bute: Silver Streak Hawk moth. Occasional pest on vines.

Sandringham: Caterpillar of Giant Hawk Moth

Woori Yallock; Brown chrysalis found in the ground was pupa of a Swift Moth.

Mt Gambier: Night-flying Swift Moth, *Pielus* sp. Larvae are destructive to the roots of pine trees.

St Arnaud: Cup moth caterpillars or Chinese Junks. Often mentioned and a pest locally. Feb 18

Bunyip: Gum Emperor Moth June 17

Mincha & Glenferrie: Wattle Goat Moth Mar 17

Broadford: Ribbed Case Moth. Like the Stick and Leaf Case Moths the caterpillars live inside their bag. The females never emerge laying their eggs inside the case
Oct 16

Ouyen; A Vine moth, destructive to grape vines.

OTHER INSECTS

Horsham: No not a bee, count the wings, this has only two while a bee has four. It is *Syrphid* or Hover Fly.

Wonthaggi: Harlequin Bugs, sap suckers. Dec 17

Geelong: More sap suckers; Metallic Blue-black Leaf Hoppers, *Eurymela*, related to Cicadas. Nov 18

Geelong: Large metallic blue ant with a powerful sting is actually a wingless wasp, *Diamma bicolor*.

Newport and 3 others; Longicorn Beetle, *Phorocantha*. Suggest that a load of firewood has arrived from a country district where these are rife.

Wallaloo: Insect resembling a dainty little moth is the Silky Lacewing Fly *Psychopsis*

Stawell: Water beetles only visit water to catch their prey. They are actually flying insects especially at night when they are attracted to lights.

Teddywaddy: Large Robber Fly. Mar 17

Mitcham: Scavenger Fly *Tachinidae*. Larva is parasitic on other insects.

Rupanyup: Large Click Beetle - *Elateridae*. Larva lives underground as a giant wireworm, doing damage to roots of grasses, crops and garden plants.

Manangatang: Orange Red Leaf Beetle. Small beetles with highly domed bodies. They denude the leaves of forest trees.

Ferny Creek; Wingless insects, black-banded with yellow and body crinkled like a concertina are young of the Gumleaf Hopper, allied to the Cicada.

Kingsville: Lines and Patches on the gum-leaf are caused by the Leaf-miner grub which gets between the upper and lower skins of the leaf which give it protection. Some are larvae of a small fly while others are the larvae of moths.

Leongatha: Golden-eyed Lacewing Fly. Very beneficial because the larva feeds voraciously on aphids and other harmful insects. Mar 16

Parkville: Rhinoceros Beetle, so-called from the "Horn" on the nose, which is lacking in this specimen because it is a female. It is closely related to the Dung Beetle and the Scarab Beetle. July 16

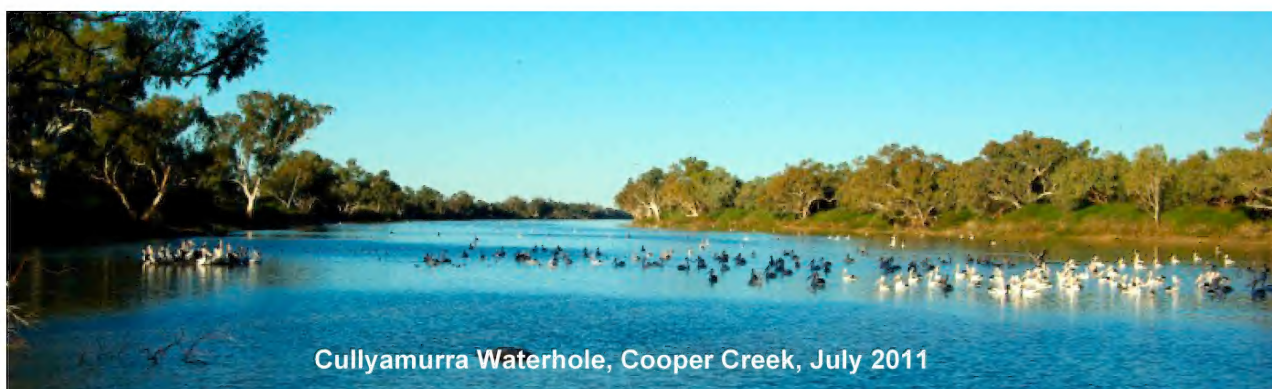
Rainbow: Jewel Beetle *Buprestidae*, One of the most beautiful beetles in the world. The larva feeds on decaying wood. May 17

Melbourne: Golden Stag Beetle, *Lamprima muellerii*. The larvae bore holes in trees. The body looks as if made of pure gold and has been worn as a brooch. The males have "antlers" which are used in the same way as real antlers, i.e. fighting over females.

Nyah West: Long-horned Grasshopper, female with extremely long egg-laying tube (ovipositor), used for injecting eggs into decaying wood.

Cheltenham: A weevil which does damage to the roots of fruit trees; because of the long snout resembling a trunk they have been called "Elephant Beetles" *Xylotropes ulysses australicus*

<p>Thanks to all who contribute to the newsletter The deadline for articles for the June edition of Castlemaine Naturalist is before June 1st</p>
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Tracking Boom and Bust – Bird Surveys around Innamincka

Peter Turner

Innamincka is one of the most remote places in Australia, a small settlement on Cooper Creek in far north-east South Australia. The Innamincka Regional Reserve of 13,545 square kilometres along with the 267 square kilometres Malkumba-Coongie National Park was proclaimed in 1988. This is one of the most arid areas of the world with an average annual rainfall of 172 mm and an annual evaporation rate of 3600 mm. It comprises extensive floodplains, wetlands, swamps, channels and both ephemeral and semi-permanent lakes, which derive from water flow events in Cooper Creek.

At our April meeting, Euan Moore spoke about the work of the Friends of the Innamincka Reserves, formed in 1999 by a group of volunteers to support the work of the reserves' Rangers. Euan and Jenny Rolland have been involved with annual bird surveys since 2011, camping with fellow volunteers on the Reserve while conducting a series of standard 2 ha/20 min bird surveys mainly along the Cooper Creek as well as more intensive 4 km transect surveys covering fauna and flora at 10 km intervals along tracks radiating out from Innamincka. The transect surveys will be repeated every 4-5 years.

Several Aboriginal groups lived along the Cooper prior to European pastoralists bringing in cattle in 1872, followed by a police camp, inland mission – abandoned in 1951 – and the Innamincka Hotel in the 1960's. Pre-European artefacts and middens are frequently encountered while conducting the surveys.

The effects of climate change are reflected in a significant increase in average rainfall over the period since records started in 1883, and an increase in temperature over the past 30 years, both consistent with predictions.

After the major rains in 2010, 2011 was a boom year for fauna and flora. Euan described the results of the surveys, illustrating the dramatic boom and bust nature of this environment – e.g., some years no budgerigars sighted, then thousands another year. The talk was illustrated with stunning photographs of the landscapes and the birds and other features of this fascinating part of our country. Euan and Jenny will return in July for the next set of surveys.





Letterwing Kite – a rare bird even in this area



Cinnamon Quailthrush – at home on the gibber plain

- all photos by Euan Moore

An afternoon amongst significant trees

Noel Young

Our excursion on the 13th of April consisted of a slow ramble around the route outlined in George Broadway's new brochure "Significant trees in the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens", and led by none other than the author, who added some interesting background to around 30 trees listed in the publication and marked on a map. Bird watchers in the group also had a "field day" with sightings of a Rose Robin, the resident pair of Powerful Owls, and even a well hidden Boobook.



Above: The magnificent Indian Bean Tree *Catalpa bignonioides*, the largest in Victoria and Heritage registered.



Above right: Our pair of Powerful Owls continue to favour the CBG.

Right: George explains the history and identification of the gardens' specimens.



The Birds of Sutton Grange April 2019

Nigel Harland

Red Wattlebird	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
New Holland Honeyeater	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Long-billed Corella	Crimson Rosella
Tree Martin	Welcome Swallow
Galah	White-browed Scrubwren
Superb Fairy Wren	Australian Raven
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Grey Shrike-thrush
Willie Wagtail	Red-browed Finch
Common Bronzewing	House Sparrow
Eastern Spinebill	Collared Sparrowhawk

A typical Autumn/Winter list

Plant surveys

Richard Piesse

Early in the 2000's, Ern and Lesley Perkins commenced surveying native plants in bush plots – the first four were 10m x 10m quadrats in the Botanical Gardens bushland across the creek.

Ern decided to record the regeneration and/or extinction of native plant species in the state forests and parks around Castlemaine after controlled burns set up by the government department (now DELWP). He established over 100 20m x 20m quadrats (originally 30m x 30m) to follow plant growth and regeneration within the control burn areas and in the unburnt bushland immediately outside each burn area.

Each quadrat was divided into five 4m wide strips and every plant species was identified and recorded – identification only made possible because of Ern's detailed knowledge. A full count was made of grass tussocks and woody plants such as wattles, peas, heaths, eucalypts and a few others (including grevilleas).

There is an amazing database of information from these surveys and it would be great if the Club could resurrect the surveys, especially as the effects of climate change alters the environment around us. A minimum team size of three is preferable, but as many members as possible to "learn the ropes" – and learn more about our local plants and their status – would make the task easier in the long run.

Orchids of the Castlemaine District

Rita Mills recently presented many documents to the Club, including a wonderful booklet she produced in 1988, *Orchids of the Castlemaine District*. 64 different orchids are described and illustrated.

Since then 2 Diuris orchids have not been seen (or not recorded in Ern Perkins' plant list) and over 15 (nearly a quarter!) have had a botanical name change. As well, nearly 20 new orchids have been identified and added to Ern's list since September 1988. The 2012 edition of Ern's leaflet *Common Orchids of the Castlemaine District* is being revised and updated for republication.

- Richard Piesse

SEANA in Castlemaine

The First Circular and the Registration Form for SEANA's Spring 2019 gathering in Castlemaine for the first weekend in October (4th-7th) have been emailed to SEANA's 21 member clubs and over 200 people who have attended SEANA camps in recent years. We've already had a few responses.

The First Circular, with the program and information on accommodation options etc, and the Registration Form, will be available soon from the Club's website, and copies will be available at meetings. Registration is due by 2nd August.

The meeting will be based at the Campbells Creek Community Centre, with a meal on the Friday evening followed by a talk by Geoff Park. Excursions will be held on the Saturday and Sunday, and for those staying on, on the Monday morning. After the dinner on Saturday evening, the guest speaker will be Tim Entwisle, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Garden Skinks

Peter Turner

The common skink found in our garden is the Pale-Flecked Garden Sun-skink, *Lampropholis guichenoti*, also referred to as the Grass Skink.. They are usually plentiful on warm to hot days. They have a coppery appearance, particularly around the head. (below left)

More recently I have had a few sightings of South-Eastern Slider, *Lerista bouganvillii*. It is about the same size as or slightly smaller than the Grass Skink. It lacks the copper colour around the head but has a coppery to bright red tail.



Observations

Denis Hurley – Expedition Pass reservoir 10.30 am, 12/4/19

22 Eurasian Coot (3 or 4 in 2018); 3 Purple Swamphen; 1 female Musk Duck; 5 Pacific Black Duck; 1 White-faced Heron; 3 Little Pied Cormorants; 2 Little Black Cormorants.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists

Coming events

Fri May 10 Meeting: speaker CHRIS TZAROS on Turquoise Parrot conservation in the Warby Ranges

Sat May 11 field trip: Swift Parrot search

Mon May 13 – Roadside cleanup - Organiser Geoff Harris
9 a.m. start at cnr. Golf Links road and Pyrenees Highway

Takes 1 – 2 hrs., Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Garbage bags and reflective vests will be supplied. Please note KABC rules prohibit anyone under 16 from working on the roadside.

Fri June 14 Meeting: speaker ALISON POULIOT on Fungi

Sat June 15 field trip: Fungi in Wombat Forest with Gayle Osborne

Fri July 12 Meeting: speaker PATRICK KAVANAGH (TBC)

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2019

Ordinary membership: Single \$35, Family \$50

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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